



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE BUFFALO PLAN OF TEACHER TRAINING<sup>1</sup>

W. HOWARD PILLSBURY

Deputy Superintendent of Schools, Buffalo, New York

One of the biggest jobs that confront any superintendent of schools is the increase in the efficiency of the teaching corps. Providing building accommodations, securing funds for the operation of schools, educating the public as well as the board of education, measuring the efficiency of the schools under his charge, organizing special facilities for night schools, Americanization, subnormal and supernormal children, formulating courses of study, choosing textbooks, making reports, all the multifarious duties of a superintendent down to the answering of questionnaires for the students of graduate schools of education—all of these are important and all demand attention.

But after all is said and done, the heart of the school system is the teacher. In the last analysis the success of the entire system depends upon her efficiency. The course of study, the physical plant, and all its facilities may be of the highest type, but if the teaching corps is weak the product is bound to be poor. And, on the other hand, no matter what the physical conditions, a strong teacher can always teach. Garfield hit on a great truth when he said "Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other constitute a University." The heart of the schoolroom is always the teacher, and the superintendent who can succeed in bringing the ability of the teaching corps to a high level of efficiency has made tremendous returns on its investment to the city he serves.

To the superintendent undertaking such a problem there are three possible points of attack. First, there is the elimination of the incompetent. Theoretically, at least, we all realize the desirability of getting rid of the unfit. From a purely economic standpoint there can be no question that the presence of the inefficient

<sup>1</sup> A paper read before the New York State Teachers' Association.

teacher is a decided factor in keeping salaries low. Whenever workers in any occupation are paid as a group, regardless of the personal efficiency of the individuals composing the group, the rate of payment tends to be fixed by the abilities of the poorest members of the group. This is an economic law and undoubtedly accounts in a large measure for the low salaries paid to teachers as compared with those paid in other occupations demanding a similar preparation.

But teaching is a profession, not a business, and must, therefore, be judged from the standpoint of service. The difference between a business and a profession is that the former is primarily conducted for personal gain, while the primary object of the latter is service. Just in so far, therefore, as a profession substitutes personal gain for service as a standard, just so far it ceases to be a profession and becomes a business. From this point of view the evils of inefficiency are so obvious as to need no discussion. There can be no defense for the incompetent teacher. Theoretically, therefore, all thoughtful teachers are agreed that the best interests of any school system demand the elimination of the unfit.

In practice, however, this method will always be used with the utmost reluctance and only after every possible resource has been exhausted. To deprive a teacher of her position in a system in whose service she has, in many cases, given her best years, regardless of the quality of that service, will always excite in the average human mind that inherent sympathy for the person dismissed which will tend to outweigh the less tangible, more abstract, demands of justice to the children. Moreover, under the New York state law giving teachers in a city of the first class life tenure, dismissal for incompetency is practically impossible. To be sure, the machinery for such action exists, but the outcome is always more or less problematical, for it is easier to prove a concrete crime like murder than such an intangible thing as inefficiency, and the undesirable publicity of charges and countercharges incidental to conducting such an action is so disastrous to the well-being of the schools that the cure is in most cases worse than the disease. This method will, therefore, be used only in cases where conditions have become no longer tolerable. It is practically

eliminated from our consideration as a means of increasing the efficiency of a teaching corps.

Second, improvement can be made through the careful selection of new teachers. Every system has each year to select a large number of teachers to fill vacancies caused by marriage, death, and resignation, and to care for the expansion incidental to a rapidly growing system. While the number of such changes is not as great in a large system as in a smaller, even here it usually amounts to nearly 10 per cent of the entire force. If, therefore, the superintendent is free to search out the best teaching ability that can be found, and if his city is willing to pay such salaries as will attract a high quality of teaching skill, this can be made a powerful means of gradually raising the level of efficiency in the entire corps.

Here again, however, for cities of the first class in the state of New York, the state law intervenes, for such cities are required by law to select teachers in the order of their standing on a list prepared as a result of examination. Now teaching is at once a science and an art. As a science, it is rapidly developing a well-organized body of principles and methods. The candidate's knowledge of these principles can very well be tested by written examination. As an art, however, it is just as absurd to expect a written examination to act as a selective agent as it would be to use a similar method in picking a football team, an artist, or a musician. We are aware that some cities in the state have found ways of evading this difficulty, but for Buffalo at least the frankly political habits of thought from which it is but slowly emerging make these methods impossible. And until conditions change so that it becomes possible to select teachers on the basis of their ability to teach, this source of improvement will also continue to be more or less of a broken reed.

Third, with the possibility of eliminating the unfit removed, and the power of selection on the basis of teaching ability seriously impaired, there remains to most of the larger cities of New York state but one source of increased efficiency, namely, the improvement of teachers already in the service.

The supply of new teachers for any system falls naturally into three classes: graduates just out of the normal school, college

graduates, and teachers who come into a system from other localities.

To assume that graduates fresh from normal school possess all the qualifications that characterize the successful or competent teacher is clearly absurd. Remembering the abysmal ignorance of the average normal student of the subject-matter of the curriculum she is expected to teach, it is easy to see that her short two-year course is all too brief for acquiring subject-matter and the science aspects of teaching. But teaching is also a practical art and as in every other art power can only be developed in the medium in which it is to be exercised. Just as swimming can only be learned in the water, so teaching ability must be developed in the classroom. We should not expect by a brief period of practice supplementing an extensive study of the history of music, harmony, counterpoint, and the like to produce a pianist. No more can the academic teaching of principles and methods, supplemented by an hour a day for a year, under the necessarily artificial conditions of practice teaching, produce a teacher. The development of ability in the art of teaching is, and so long as the normal course is confined to two years will in the nature of the case always be, largely a matter for the schools in which the graduate receives her experience.

But if the graduate of the normal school is far from being a finished product, the case of the college graduate is still worse. She comes from a school where subject-matter alone is considered important, where teaching is treated as an academic subject with the art side practically ignored, having fresh in her mind the methods of her college professor, notoriously the poorest teacher in the whole field of education. She is assigned to a class where she has little to expect in the way of supervisory help and left to work out her own salvation by the trial-and-error method. That she frequently succeeds under such conditions in developing strong teaching ability is a tribute rather to those qualities of personality, tact, determination, and intelligence which enabled her to complete successfully her college course, than to any so-called teacher-training which she may have received.

The teacher who comes from other localities may or may not be a competent teacher. If she has been fortunate enough to have

secured her experience under a principal who is particularly strong as a teacher-builder, or if she is a natural teacher, she will become an invaluable addition to any corps. But if, on the other hand, as is more likely, she belongs to neither of these two classes, she is likely to be more of a problem than the girl fresh from the normal school. Her teaching habits, formed largely by chance, have become more or less fixed, and it is much more difficult to correct bad habits than to establish good habits *de novo*. Worst of all, she has had enough practical experience so that she feels that there is little left for her to learn in the art of teaching. Instead of being eager for suggestions, as is ordinarily true in the case of the normal graduate without experience, she is likely to resent any hint of the desirability of change.

It is primarily to meet this situation that the Buffalo plan of teacher-training was devised and it is this plan which I wish to discuss with you this afternoon.

In brief, the principal features of this plan are as follows: By agreement with the University of Buffalo and Canisius College, all graduates of the Buffalo State Normal School are given credit for two full years of collegiate work. Upon passing the city competitive examination they receive the usual probationary contract terminable at any time within two years upon the successful completion of which their tenure becomes permanent. They are assigned to one of six schools designated as "teacher-centers," given a regular class, and receive the full pay provided by the salary-schedule for the beginning teacher. The considerations governing the selection of these teacher-centers were threefold. First, a principal who had demonstrated unusual ability as a teacher-builder; second, a school which had established high ideals of achievement for the various grades; third, accessibility to the normal school and the university where the probationary teacher takes her extra work.

For every four or five probationary teachers, each center has one supervisory teacher who, by reason of her high ideals, strong personality, capacity for growth, and unusual instructional skill, has shown special aptitude for this work. She helps the probationary teacher plan her lessons; sympathetically evaluates her

performance; takes her classes for demonstration purposes; aids her in her disciplinary troubles; keeps her in touch with the most helpful literature of her subjects; encourages, stimulates, and assists her in all her difficulties; in short, acts as a "big sister" or official adviser.

For the work at the teacher-centers, if successful, the probationer is given two college credits for each semester on the ground that this constitutes her laboratory work. This teaching credit may be continued for three years, making it possible for her to secure twelve credits for successful teaching. College credit for successful teaching is somewhat of a novelty and was not gained without considerable effort. The necessary credit was, however, finally granted and as a result, for the first time, so far as I know, in the history of education, successful teaching under the most careful supervision is placed on a footing of collegiate equality with such sacred operations as changing chemical compounds and carving crayfish.

In addition to the arduous work involved in the intensive training of the teacher-center, each probationer is required to take a two-hour course in what we term, for want of a better name, "college civics." We are passing through a period of general unrest and vague dissatisfaction with all existing institutions. Every man who finds his abilities inadequate for making a success of his own affairs feels a strong call to the less arduous and much more soul-satisfying task of reforming the world. That the carrying out of his particular scheme of reform may involve the tearing down of all that the race has so laboriously built up in the slow and painful progress of civilization seems to him a mere detail. We may deport the most dangerous of these radicals but we cannot deport the dangerous idea. For that, the sole remedy is education. The object of this course in college civics is to orient the probationary teacher in the social order of which she forms a part and to give her a few sound notions of the fundamental principles of economics and sociology. This course pursued throughout the year carries four college credits.

At the end of her year at the teacher-center the probationer has acquired sixty-four credits for her normal-school work, four

for college civics, and, anticipating the next two years, twelve for successful teaching, making a total of eighty college credits. As one hundred and twenty-eight credits are required for graduation, she has forty-eight still to secure.

She is then assigned to one of the regular schools of the city, making way for a new group of incoming teachers at the teacher-centers. If she wishes to work for a degree, she must now decide on her future line of work as a teacher of upper or lower elementary grades, or of some special subject in the intermediate schools or senior high school. For each of these fields a course of required subjects, together with sufficient electives to complete the remaining forty-eight credits required for graduation, is laid down by the university. This work has been so arranged that it can all be taken after school hours and on Saturday forenoon. The teacher may progress rapidly or slowly according to her abilities and inclinations and upon completion of this work, together with the submission of a satisfactory thesis, she is granted the regular Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Buffalo. Similar arrangements have been made with Canisius College.

The several advantages of the Buffalo plan of teacher-training are obvious.

1. To the teacher herself, the opportunities offered by the scheme are especially great. Many a student has been forced to abandon a desire for a college education because of inability, real or fancied, to meet the financial strain. The Buffalo plan enables the ambitious student to get a college education under the most favorable conditions. The work at the normal school involves no expense for tuition. The work at the college or university is done while the student is under full pay as a regular teacher in the Buffalo system.

Her introduction into teaching life at the teacher-center is made under the most favorable auspices. One of the strongest arguments that has been advanced for the intermediate schools is the need for overcoming the break between the elementary school and the high school. Yet, I suppose the feeling of helplessness which comes over the Freshman in meeting his first high-school experiences is very mild indeed as compared to that of the inexperienced teacher



entering upon her first position. She comes fresh from the normal school where her practice-teaching, at best extremely limited, has all been performed under more or less artificial conditions under the watchful eye of a critic teacher, with small classes in a classroom for which she feels little or no responsibility. From this highly academic atmosphere she is suddenly transplanted into a classroom where she is made entirely responsible for thirty to fifty children, every one of them a live wire, watchfully waiting for the opportunity to try her out. Here she is left to sink or swim as best she may. She is usually ignorant of most of the details of what has become to the regular teacher a mere matter of routine. Even so simple a thing as the making out of reports seems to the beginner a formidable task.

The careful preparation of the normal school which is designed to prepare her for precisely this situation means little or nothing to her at the time because she has no apperceptive mass of classroom experience with which to assimilate it. She is afraid to take her trivial difficulties to her fellow-teachers because she has a feeling that they from their heights of superior experience would look upon the mere presence of such difficulties as a confession of weakness. Still less would she think of bothering the principal with them. She flounders along as best she can, learning largely by the trial-and-error method. If, instead of normal-training, she comes from college graduation into a high-school position, her situation is even more difficult.

Compare the experience of a teacher under these conditions with that of the probationer at a teacher-center. Here she is associated with a group which is on an equal footing with herself. She feels perfectly free to discuss her difficulties because she knows that all the other teachers are going through exactly the same experiences, and she has in the supervisory teacher a woman of strong personality, high ideals, big sympathies, wide experience, unusual skill in teaching. Her ambitions are fostered, her ideas sympathetically considered, her difficulties removed. She has a friend, an advisor to whom she can go with all her troubles, who is, in fact, there for precisely that purpose. Under these conditions, she cannot help but grow. As one girl expressed it, who came to

us after several years of experience, "Why, I didn't know there was so much to learn about teaching as I have already acquired in these few weeks at this center."

I have so far throughout this paper referred to the teacher as "she," because in most cases she is a "she." But this scheme should prove unusually attractive for young men as well. Great as is the shortage of teachers in general throughout the country, there is a much greater shortage in the supply of adequately trained men for administrative positions in education. To men who are looking forward to such positions, as well as those desiring to teach in the intermediate school or high school, this scheme should appeal with particular force, for it is difficult to conceive of a better direct preparation for any of these lines of work while at the same time acquiring a Bachelor's degree.

2. It co-ordinates the three great educational forces of the city, the normal school, the university and college, and the public school. The normal school has always had a large share in furnishing teachers for Buffalo. The local colleges have always enrolled hundreds of Buffalo teachers in their extension courses. Under this plan these forces will be brought into close co-operation with one another through the medium of the public schools for the definite purpose of better service. Such a close co-operation for a common end cannot fail to react beneficially on all three.

For the normal school it means a considerable increase in enrolment. With the close co-operation between the normal school and city department, the duplication of expense and effort involved in the conduct of the city training school is no longer necessary. This is therefore abandoned, and its students transferred to the normal school, releasing its training facilities for use in the teacher-centers. It attracts to the normal school a large class of students who would otherwise be lost to it—the ambitious who wish to secure a college education but who are deterred by expense. The ease of securing a degree while under full pay as teachers in the public-school system makes teaching much more attractive. The addition of this class of students who are willing to work while acquiring college training is no small consideration.

It helps to obviate two of the most serious criticisms which are brought against the work of our normal schools as at present constituted.

a) They do not train teachers in the practical art of teaching. Under the Buffalo plan this objection is entirely removed, as far as teachers entering the Buffalo system are concerned, as teaching ability is developed in the teacher-center.

b) The normal schools are out of touch with the practical conditions of teaching for which they are fitting their students. They have no follow-up system by which they would be enabled to learn to just what extent the training which they are giving is actually functioning in the classroom. This lack of contact with practical conditions tends to make them respond very slowly to the changes necessitated by changing social demands. Under the Buffalo plan the concentration of such of its graduates as enter the Buffalo system into six centers minimizes the difficulty of following them up. It is comparatively easy for the normal school to check closely the results of its preparation under practical conditions and to become immediately responsive to the needs of at least this portion of its market. Furthermore, in making such changes as are found necessary it has at its disposal the practical experience of some of the ablest principals and teachers of the department who are handling large numbers of its graduates every year.

3. To the University of Buffalo it brings a corresponding advantage. The University of Buffalo, while not in any way supported by municipal taxes nor directly under city control, is to all intents and purposes a municipal university. Its clientèle as well as its support comes almost entirely from Buffalo and the immediate vicinity. As a result of this close co-operation with the city department it is enrolling hundreds of students who would otherwise find a college education impossible. They have had two years of normal experience and one year in the teacher-center. They are ambitious enough to set aside, out of the busy life of the teacher, the time for serious study. Their work for the last three to six years of their course is done under the constant check of academic study with practical teaching conditions. Comparing

the happy-go-lucky days of our own college experience with the serious purpose and necessary maturity of these students, we will venture to say that such conditions will produce a scholarship at least equal if not superior to that of the ordinary college. It makes the university, as it should be, the capstone of a system of public-school education and enables it to supply its own community with teachers whose specific preparation for local needs is probably superior to that offered by any college or university in the country. It paves the way for the addition to its group of professional schools of a teachers' college which will have in a small way for western New York a function similar to that of Columbia's Teachers College for the whole country. Already the nucleus of such a college is found in the some 1,500 Buffalo teachers who are doing extension work in connection with normal school, college, and university.

4. Last, but by no means least, is the advantage which accrues to the city system. The theoretical training in principles and methods given at the normal school, together with the intensive practical training of the teacher-centers, supplemented by the breadth of culture of the university, brings to the city system teachers with an unusually rich preparation. A teacher trained under such conditions is insured, in so far as such insurance is possible, against that ossification or bovine contentment with present achievements which constitutes so great a danger to members of the teaching profession. The ideals of accomplishment acquired in schools especially selected for their possibilities in this matter; the wealth of educational literature with which the probationer is brought into contact in all three sources of training; and above all the habits of study coupled with the constant checking up of theoretical instruction with practical conditions—all these, coming at that time in her life when psychology teaches us that professional habits are crystallizing, will inevitably carry over into her whole future career, making the attitude of the student an integral part of her character. This influx of highly trained teachers into all departments of the system will constitute a most powerful influence in leavening the entire corps and will probably

eventuate in salaries based on preparation and ability rather than the particular section of the school system in which the teacher may elect to cast her lot.

On the other hand, the Buffalo plan enables the department to discover incompetents before permanent damage is done. Under present conditions with principals inadequately trained for supervision and supervisors responsible for impossible numbers of teachers, it is a comparatively easy matter for the competent to drift through two years of probation into a life-tenure. This is no longer possible under the close supervision of the teacher-center.

In the inauguration of the Buffalo plan of teacher-training I believe that Superintendent Hartwell has made a real contribution to education. With the coming of better salaries throughout the northern states we have come to think that the crisis, as a result of the tremendous teacher shortage throughout the country, is largely a matter of history. The fact is that for the country as a whole, despite the upward tendency in teachers' salaries, there are today, according to the latest estimates of the United States Commissioner of Education, nearly 93,000 teaching positions either unfilled or occupied by teachers with qualifications below the standard required in 1914. And when we remember that the standards required of teachers in the United States even in 1914 were very low the crisis is evidently serious, constituting a real menace to the very foundations of our democracy. Coming at such a time this scheme not only points the way to a more efficient teacher-training, but by making it possible to earn a college degree while under full pay as a teacher greatly enhances the attractiveness of the teaching profession to that most desirable of all material—the ambitious student. The Buffalo plan is, therefore, worthy of the serious consideration of all who are interested in the quality of our teaching service not only in New York state but throughout the entire nation.